

The significance of January 6 and the conspiracy to establish a dictatorship in the United States

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With the opening of the public hearings of the House Select Committee on January 6, any discussion of the event must begin with an acknowledged and undeniable fact: The president of the United States, Donald Trump, sought to organize a coup d'état, overthrow the Constitution and establish a personalist dictatorship. And he came very close to succeeding.

Representative Bennie Thompson, the Democratic Party chairman of the committee, was direct in his characterization Thursday: “January 6 was the culmination of an attempted coup,” he said. The violent attack on the Capitol, Thompson added, was no accident. “It represented Trump’s last, most desperate chance to halt the transfer of power.”

This fact is of monumental significance. The history of the United States now includes the attempted overthrow of the government by a sitting president. An event of this sort has not taken place, in the modern era, in any other advanced capitalist country.

The hearings have only begun, but even the presentation of facts on the first day raises several unanswered questions: Why did the assault on the Capitol encounter virtually no resistance? Why, over three hours, were no measures taken to stop it? Given the fact that Trump had been denouncing the legitimacy of the elections since they took place, why, far from preparations being made, is it evident that all means of defending the Capitol were effectively disengaged? What, moreover, was the Democratic Party doing during this period? Why was Biden silent? And why has it taken 18 months for the hearings to be even held?

Two critical issues are involved in answering these questions.

First, an event of such a character can only be understood in social, political and class terms. In a fundamental sense, the attempted overthrow of the government signifies that a substantial section of the American ruling class was prepared to accept the establishment of a presidential dictatorship. This is substantiated by the fact that Trump’s

actions had the overwhelming support of the Republican Party, along with significant backing within the capitalist state at every level.

In the months prior to January 6, top Republicans, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, legitimized Trump’s claims of a stolen election. The storming of the Capitol was one part of a plan that included objections from Republican officials to the electors appointed by states that Biden won. Even after the coup attempt, in the early morning hours of January 7, two-thirds of Republicans voted against the certification of the results.

Trump and his co-conspirators, moreover, had significant backing within the military and police apparatus. In March 2021, D.C. National Guard Commander William Walker testified that a period of three hours and 19 minutes elapsed between his initial request to top military command for the deployment of National Guard troops and its final approval.

Second, the feckless response of the Democratic Party to the coup demonstrated the absence of any significant commitment to bourgeois democracy within the ruling class. The Democrats were clearly aware of Trump’s plans to remain in office. In June of 2020, Biden said that his “single greatest concern” was that “this president is going to try to steal the election.”

However, the Democrats took no action to counter the coup or to alert the public as to what was happening. On January 6, President-Elect Biden waited several hours before saying anything. When he finally delivered a statement, he made the extraordinary appeal to Trump himself to “step up” and go on national television to call off the insurrection that he had himself organized.

The Democrats were, and are, terrified of doing anything that arouses broader opposition within the population. Throughout the Trump administration, their differences with Trump were centered primarily on issues of foreign policy, and in particular the demand for more aggressive measures against Russia.

Even in the January 6 hearings, all the actions of the Democrats are pitched to the right, in typically supine manner: the putting forward of Republican Liz Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, as the principal spokesperson for the committee; the glorification of Mike Pence, William Barr, and other Republican operatives; etc.

Meanwhile, Biden has remained silent on the hearings and has said nothing about the January 6 coup since his speech on the anniversary six months ago. According to the White House, this is because Biden does not want to “politicize” the investigation into an attempted fascistic insurrection against his own presidency!

Based on what we now know, if the coup had succeeded there is no reason to believe that the Democratic Party would have opposed it. The Democrats would have adapted themselves to the new facts on the ground, with at most appeals for the intervention of the military or the Supreme Court, which includes as one of its justices Clarence Thomas, the husband of one of the chief conspirators in the coup.

Fifty years ago, the involvement of the Nixon administration in the break-in of Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate office building was seen as sufficiently serious to require extensive hearings and prosecutions that culminated in Nixon’s resignation.

The events that took place on January 6, 2021 are of a qualitatively different character—the effort to overthrow the Constitution and establish a dictatorship. However, none of those centrally involved have been arrested. The Democratic Party has not even said what the aims of the congressional hearings are or suggested that they are intended to establish a case for the indictment and prosecution of Trump. On the contrary, the hearings were preceded by the decision of the Justice Department not to indict top Trump aides, Mark Meadows and Dan Scavino.

The situation is extremely dangerous. The coup of January 6 arose out of the protracted and terminal crisis of American democracy, rooted, above all, in the extreme growth of social inequality. All the conditions that brought it about have only escalated. There are mounting signs of economic crisis and collapse, as inflation rages out of control. While ignored by the entire political establishment and the media, the pandemic continues to spread.

The ruling class, as it wages world war abroad and confronts growing domestic opposition at home, turns to dictatorial forms of rule. The fact that American democracy is on the brink of collapse is now widely recognized. In the international press, there is open discussion about the prospect of civil war and the disintegration of the country.

The Republican Party, speaking for the most ruthless

sections of the ruling class, is unrepentant and aggressive. To this day, the Republican Party overwhelmingly supports Trump and is preparing to take over control of Congress in the midterm elections.

The Democratic Party, far from rallying opposition, pleads for “unity” and “bipartisan” tolerance. It seeks, as always, to conceal, demoralize and do everything it can to divert social anger against the existing system along reactionary lines, above all war.

The union organizations, politically aligned with the Democratic Party, do everything they can to subvert and suppress opposition in the working class. The organizations of the upper-middle class pseudo-left work to alienate and confuse workers with the promotion of racial and gender politics. Another section of the pseudo-left has been thoroughly exposed by its efforts to downplay the seriousness of the coup, treat it as insignificant, and even solidarize itself with Trump.

What emerges from an analysis of the events of January 6 and the ongoing conspiracy is that opposition to dictatorship and the defense of the most basic democratic rights must be developed as a movement of the working class. This is not an abstract question. A year and a half after Trump’s attempted coup, there is a growing movement of workers in the US and internationally, enormously accelerated by the economic and social consequences of the pandemic and war.

This objective process, however, must be developed into a conscious political movement against capitalism and the entire political apparatus of the ruling class. This means, above all, the building of the Socialist Equality Party as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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